exhibition and distribution of documentary and experimental films **CINEMA 16** incorporated

175 Lexington Avenue New York 16, New York Murray Hill 9-7288 and 9-7289

Amos Vogel
Executive Secretary

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This letter will come as an unhappy surprise. I address it to you as one of our loyal friends.

Cinema 16 is faced with a grave problem. For the past 15 years, we have achieved what no other cultural, non-profit venture in New York has even attempted; to run on a self-sustaining basis. All existing cultural projects depend on heavy subsidies from wealthy individuals or organizations. In contrast, Cinema 16 has so far derived its income entirely from memberships.

While the years have seen our transformation from a struggling venture into an institution, the financial tide has been running against us. Our costs, as has been true of other cultural projects, have risen faster than our income which has also been adversely affected by factors more fully explored in the enclosed report.

To keep ahead of increases in theatre and film rentals, printing, advertising and mailing costs, we raised membership fees slightly on three occasions, but have finally reached the point where they can be raised no further. We are thus caught in a financial squeeze.

As a result, a cumulative deficit which we had hoped to eliminate, has instead grown into a sum which threatens our existence.

I have never before approached you for help. Now I must.

This is an appeal for $20,000. It is being mailed to 4000 people. If each were to contribute $5, the problem would be solved. However, since we cannot assume this, we suggest a minimum contribution of at least $10 per person and more if you can. This appeal is also directed to those willing to become 'Patrons' of Cinema 16 by contributing $100 each; and finally, to the one unknown individual who could solve the problem single-handedly; by any realistic standards, our needs are modest.

In all simplicity, as of this moment Cinema 16 is in your hands. You will decide whether we will continue or suspend operations at the end of this season.

Very sincerely yours,

Amos Vogel

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Executive Secretary

THE PROBLEM

Cinema 16 has been able to exist for sixteen years solely because it fills the need for a pioneer who is one step ahead of the commercial cinemas, not subject to box-office or censorship pressures, oriented toward the art, rather than the commerce of film; a pioneer who continuously opens up new areas that are unacceptable, unavailable or even unknown to the commercial cinemas. But we are encountering serious problems.

Costs: In the past five years, our costs have risen over 30%. The brochure cost is now over $3000; a Sunday Times advertisement $500; the recent postal increase adds $1000 annually. Our importation of features, while assuring you of films not available elsewhere, has added $300 customs and transportation costs per title, exclusive of the high rental fee required to lure films across the ocean.

On the other hand, our salaries remain at a modest weekly $360 for 3 people (some unpaid at present); and our average membership income of $14.50 for 15 shows represents a 90¢ admission charge per program. Though this seems modest, we feel that we cannot ask you to pay more without losing in numbers. This gap between rising costs and stationary membership fees is one decisive factor in our crisis.

Thousands of Members, but-: While we maintain the proud distinction of being the world's largest film society, membership totals fluctuate too close to our constantly increasing minimum requirements and have at times fallen below them.

The right to be controversial: By refusing to reject unpopular but meritorious films which meet with a measure of resistance even from our own membership (avant-garde works, controversial social films, etc.); by refusing to show films of questionable value but of popular appeal, we suffer financially, while fulfilling our true function.

Newspaper coverage: We have been clearly told by the newspapers that we cannot expect as much publicity as we deserve, their space being reserved primarily for the commercial cinema, a prime advertising source. Nor can we disregard the 'undischarged responsibility' of most mass circulation film critics toward our venture, their routine support or genteel indifference. These factors add to the advertising costs necessary to make our activities known to the public.

Advances in the Commercial Film Field: In the last decade, all exhibitors, Cinema 16 included, have to some extent been affected by film showings on television. There has also been more adventurous programming by some art theatres, partly caused by 'product' shortage, partly by Cinema 16's success, which indicated to the ever timid commercial exhibitors that it may have become 'safe' to show certain new kinds of films. This is both a testimonial to our pioneering and a contributory cause of our difficulties.

THE CONTINUING NEED FOR CINEMA 16

The Limitations of the Art Theatres: Even the more adventurous art theatres, however, cannot show most of the films seen at Cinema 16. They are directly subject to box-office pressures, go out of business if their programming is too esoteric, immediately drop a film or new policy when it becomes unprofitable. This is true even of the 'repertory theatres' which have given up some of their interesting programming experiments and have fallen back on the safer American star vehicles of the 30's or double bills of all too familiar classics. These art theatres cannot rely on 'prepaid' membership incomes; cannot afford to show (far less, import!) programs consisting exclusively of shorts; nor can they show non-theatrical scientific, psychological and medical studies.

There is need for a showcase -

- for foreign films not in American distribution: Many films of artistic value are not bought by American distributors due to their presumably dubious box-office appeal. While these films therefore cannot be shown in theatres, we are readily able to obtain them for Cinema 16.

- for new film makers: the 'talents of tomorrow' are frequently discovered and premiered at Cinema 16. We were the first to show Shirley Clarke, Norman McLaren, Tony Richardson, Carmen D'Avino, Robert Breer, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Frank, Stan Vanderbeek, John Cassavetes, Robert Bresson.

- for film talk in New York, where film makers, creative artists, critics and audiences can meet face to face. Our speakers have included Dali, Flaherty, Hitchcock, Tennessee Williams, Renoir, Archer Winsten, Arthur Miller, Dylan Thomas.

- for experimental films, an area of high significance for the future of film art; we have successfully pioneered in the exhibition and distribution of such films not only in New York, but also nationally to art museums, film societies and universities.

- for controversial social documentaries, propaganda and political films.

- for short films, to us an often freer sampling of the potentialities of film art, because cheaper to produce than features. In theatres the short is an appendage to the feature; at Cinema 16, it holds a place of honor. More than 300 shorts, many of them prizewinners, have been shown by us in the last decade; most have not been commercially released and were seen only at Cinema 16.

- for censorable films: censorship, especially as to sex, violence, blasphemy, is still with us; and so are legal restrictions on psychological and medical studies. These restrictions do not apply to our screenings.

Cinema 16 thus remains the only continuing showcase for important films whose unconventional and unfashionable qualities at present deny them a commercial showing - a function of much significance for both audience and film maker. However, it has also finally become clear that a venture as unorthodox as ours cannot fully pay its own way; its deficits must be underwritten by those most concerned with its programs and activities.

We need your help. If it is not forthcoming, Cinema 16 will suspend operations at the end of the present season.

Cinema 16 Income and Expenses for the year ending August 31, 1963

Expenses:	
Salaries - Office (3 people)	$ 18,600.00
- Theatre & Projection	2,400.00
Film Rentals	4,200.00
Film Distribution Royalties	4,000.00
Film Import, Preparation, Customs	5,700.00
Advertising	5,800.00
Mailings (including postage)	5,700.00
Printing	7,100.00
Theatre and Office Rent	5,200.00
Office Expenses and Overhead	5,300.00
Legal, Accounting and Payroll Taxes	1,900.00
Insurance, Repairs, Previews, misc.	2,800.00
	$ 68,700.00
Receipts:	$ 59,000.00
Net Loss (Sept. 1, 1962-August 31, 1963)	9,700.00
Net Loss (Sept. 1, 1961-August 31, 1962)	8,370.00
Net Loss (Sept. 1, 1960-August 31, 1961)	1,900.00
Accumulated Net Loss (August 31, 1963)	$ 19,970.00

Dear Amos Vogel:

I want Cinema 16 to continue.

☐ Enclosed is $ as my contribution.

☐ Enclosed is $100. I want to be a Patron of Cinema 16.

Name_____

Address_____

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CINEMA 16

175 LEXINGTON AVENUE

NEW YORK 16, NEW YORK

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